

BASIC ISSUES OF THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN JAPAN

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This thesis intends to discuss the five basic issues of the social work profession in Japan. The situation of Japanese social workers have been changed largely since 1987 when "The Certified Social Worker and Care Worker Law" has been issued. However it is said that these five issues are still basic ones today.

In this article five dichotomies will be used which have previously been used by persons in the field of social work.

These dichotomies, reflecting controversies in the social work profession, will give you an image of the recent position of social work or social welfare in Japan, which is quite different from that of the United States. Social Work has not yet been recognized as a profession in Japan and, accordingly, many of these dichotomies center around the issue of professionalization.

1. Theory-building or Professionalization?

The first dichotomy is whether social workers are to focus on the theory-building first, with a base in the social sciences, or whether they are to concentrate on professionalization. This dichot-

omy separates the profession into two groups. The former view states that the ability of social workers to accomplish their functions, roles and tasks has not yet been established in Japan. Social workers lack the knowledge and skills necessary to become a professional group. They are of the opinion that they must first establish their own abilities before trying to promote themselves as a profession. It is a sound argument from a logical viewpoint; but, this is not the case from the view point of an organization attempting to promote its movement to the level of a profession.

It appears to me that the group with anti-professional views has a tendency to exhibit more progressive opinions. They sometimes belong to labor unions or are sympathizers with them. For me, there seems to be a contradiction that the labor unions believe that the "logic" is more important than the "movement".

One of the biggest objectors to the Social Welfare Worker Accreditation Law Proposal* in 1971, was the National Federation of Local and Municipal Government Workers' Unions in Japan, basing their objection solely on this type of "logic".

*A proposal offered in December 1971 by the Employee Affairs Section of the Central Social Welfare Advisory Council providing legal accreditation of professional social workers.

However, the history of the theory-building of other existing professions such as medicine or law, is more than three thousand years old. Social work's history of theory-building, however, is only approximately 80 years old, dating back to 1917 when Mary Richmond's book Social Diagnosis was written.

How long can we wait to formulate and complete theory-building in the future? Can we wait for three thousand years? No, we need action toward professionalization now.

It seems to me that we should become a profession first, then taking advantage of the certification or licensure of social workers, we should develop a body of knowledge. Of course, theory-building is also important for social workers, who have at least now reached the level of semi-professionals in Japan, demonstrating a certain level of theory-building already--there must be a foundation upon which to begin. For example, nurses in Japan have gone this route. In Japan, nurses were regarded as assistants to doctors, but they now have their own theories and skills developed on the basis of licensure obtained through the Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Japanese government.

The question is, which should come first, theory building or a social movement for professionalization?

2. Social Welfare Labor or Social Work Profession?

The second dichotomy is that of "social welfare labor" or "social work profession"?

Since the end of the 1960's, a theory which recognizes social work as a kind of 'labor,' based on the Marxist theory, has been advanced. In Japan it is called the "Theory of Social Welfare Labor." The central point of this theory is that a social worker is a laborer and does not have a calling. Nurses and teachers, according to this theory, are also laborers. They live on their own labor and cannot survive without selling their services as goods. Social workers are the same as teachers and nurses.

From this viewpoint it is said that the person

who uses the concept of "social welfare labor" tends to be seen as a liberal. On the other hand, those persons who use the title "social work professional" tend to be recognized as more conservative. At least this is the position in Japan. So objectors to the professionalization of social work might not use the word "profession," they instead use the term "laborer".

However, underlying this controversy it seems to me that there is some confusion. It appears that the "professional" may tend not to be concerned with reforming and upgrading the labor conditions of social workers and the social welfare system.

However, I feel that this statement is untrue. Those in favor of the professionalization of social work want to upgrade the profession and the system; but they do recognize social work as a profession.

In Japan it is very seldom that scholars talk about value systems in their lectures, articles or books. It is somewhat like a taboo to talk about values, thoughts or philosophy in an academic field.

In Japan they think it looks too "unscientific," they are strongly influenced by Max Weber's view of a "value-free approach" to the social sciences.

The controversy as to whether or not social work is considered labor or a profession is also reflected in the theoretical bases, social sciences or philosophy. However, it is very natural to think that social workers need both science and philosophy.

I think, though, that this combination, this union, is not easy to accomplish in Japan.

3. Labor Conditions or Qualifications?

The third dichotomy is "Labor Conditions or Qualifications?". Which is more important, improving the labor conditions of social workers or making their qualifications uniform. This is a very typical and traditional question in the history of professionalization of social workers in Japan.

Whenever the new movement for qualification or licensing of social workers occurs, an opposite opinion soon appears as a reaction, stating that improving the labor conditions of the social workers is the first and most important subject. This

controversy arises from the very poor labor conditions of social workers. For instance, it was said before 1970 that social workers had to work 24 hours a day in many private social welfare institutions. In 1973, the percentage of violations of this Labor Standards Law was 79.4%, which was confirmed by labor standards inspection officers.

Salaries were very low compared to other individuals of the same age who were working in private industrial companies. In 1950, for example, the salary of directors of social welfare institutions was 60% of the salary of a businessman. In the case of an assistant house-mother in a children's home, the salary was only 19% of that of a businessman. In 1975, based on the social welfare research which I conducted on a nationwide scale, the average monthly income of the house-mothers was \$344 or 83,000 Yen monthly or \$5,504 or 1.3 million Yen a year (\$1=¥241). They were working in private institutions, aged 20-24 years, and had graduated from either high school, junior college, special schools for day nursery workers, or, in some instances, a university. Ten years later, in 1985, the average annual income of these individuals is about \$6,325 or 1.89 million Yen (\$1=¥298.8).

The pro-professional people insist on the professionalization being based on qualification or licensing of social workers because their labor conditions and salaries are at such a low level.

Which has priority, labor conditions or qualification?

4. Vocational Experience or Educational Background?

The fourth dichotomy is "Vocational Experience or Educational Background?"

Japan has a long tradition of social work personnel saying that the vocational experience is more important than theory in order to best understand and help the clients. For example, a social worker or child care worker having a B.S.W. or M.S.W. with a limited amount of experience--3 to 5 years--should agree with the opinions on how to treat children which are offered by a house-mother. This house-mother generally is a high school or

junior college graduate at most, or sometimes has no educational background except the compulsory education, which goes up through junior high school, but who has extended practical experience of 15 to 20 years or more.

To give you an example, one of my friends is now an assistant professor with an M.S.W. who teaches social welfare at the junior college level. When he obtained the job several years after graduation at an institution for the mentally retarded, he was strongly criticized by the director who said that "As the 'body' is much more important than the 'head' in an institution like this, you should not be proud of your Master's degree."

According to my recent survey in 1990, the percentage of social workers with Master's degree in social agencies in Japan is only 1.6%, those with doctorate degree number only 0.1%--the actual number was only one person this year.

When Japanese social workers and scholars had the heated, nationwide controversy over the Social Welfare Worker's Accreditation Bill Proposal in the early 70's, there was much opposition. Part of the opposition was based on the issue of educational background requirements. It was felt that they ought not to be more esteemed than the vocational experience since new workers with B.S.W. degrees, but no experience, were soon able to obtain the status of 'First Class Social Worker' in this newly proposed system.

On the contrary, according to this system, social workers without any educational background except the compulsory education at the age of 15 would be able to reach the status of 'First Class Social Worker' based solely on a defined term of experience, in-service training and an examination. Educators and professional social workers were opposed to this move asking "What was the purpose of obtaining higher education at school?"

This is the general atmosphere around the experience and education in social work in Japan. Which is more highly valued, experience or education?

5. Organizational Norms or Professional Norms?

The last dichotomy is "Organizational Norms or Professional Norms?"

It is said that one of the important attributes of a profession is autonomy--the basis on which a profession can contribute to a client freely. However, a profession must also have a value system which provides a "conscience" and supports loyalty to the client. This is the so-called professional norms or "professional discipline" which is "the affective neutrality toward the client or client group" according to Robert D. Vinter.

However, Japanese social workers seldom have this sense of professional norms or autonomy. They have to obey their supervisor, managers or directors, even concerning their own clients in "a vertical society". For social workers as organizational men in a group-oriented society like Japan, the best way to promote their own status and to keep their position stable is to be obedient to organizational norms instead of professional norms or their own opinion or conscience. Where is the autonomy of the social work profession?

In addition, we seldom have the private practice of social work in Japan. However, even in Japan the discussion of advocacy by social workers has gradually increased during the last ten years. At this point, I would like to refer to the declaration done by the Task Force on Advocacy of NASW in 1968. It stated that if a social worker is in two minds, caught between loyalty toward his organization and client, he ought to choose the loyalty for the client. This kind of declaration in a professional group could most assuredly cause a worker to become isolated from other professional colleagues in his agency.

There is another type of problem concerning organizational norms in the Japanese society. The best way to achieve one's own promotion in status, especially in public agencies, is not to insist on a specialty or educational background to obtain a position at any type of agency out of his own field. In public agencies, the most popular specialty is law or economics, not social work. It is difficult for a social worker to gain a managerial or director's position in a public agency. This is quite different than the situation of CQSW's in local government in Britain and of the ACSW qual-

ification in the United States.

According to a survey I conducted, only 28% of local government or prefectural governments in Japan in 1977 have a system of Senior Official in the public administration of social welfare as a recruitment standard. The system affords a chance to promote one's status up to manager, director or upper positions in the section or division of social welfare in the main office of the local government.

Generally speaking, the specialty of social work or social welfare is not always accepted in public administration. In this sense, organizational norms are much stronger than professional norms, both in public and private agencies.

So, this dichotomy can be expressed in other words as a "Jack-of-All-Trades or Specialist."

Jack-of-All-Trades or Specialist? Which is more useful for the organization, and which is more useful for the client? Which is more important, organizational norms or professional norms?

These five dichotomies are the major controversies in the process of the professionalization of social work in Japan. They are shown in a list as follows:

Five Dichotomies on Professionalization	
Anti-professionalization	Pro-professionalization
(insiste relatively more on)	
1. Theory-building (Social sciences)	Professionalization (Philosophy)
2. Social welfare labor	Social work profession
3. Labor condition	Qualification
4. Vocational experience	Educational background
5. Organizational norms (Jack-of-All-Trades)	Professional norms (Specialist)

6. Three Major Items on Professionalization of Social Workers

Before concluding this paper, I have to emphasize three major items concerning professionalization of social workers.

(1) First, I question the purpose of professionalization. Are we making an effort for it in order only to promote and upgrade our own status in society?

It is one of the purposes, but it seems to me it is not the most important one.

I would like to list the three objectives which seem to be at the root of the move for professionalization:

1. to support and help any client as claimants or as a human beings on the basis of the professional Code of Ethics;
2. to ensure the standards of our knowledge and skills to be given to the client on the basis of professional arts;
3. to gain a strong voice of advocacy for the needy on the basis of professional authority and sanction in a society not 'for' the client but 'with' the client.

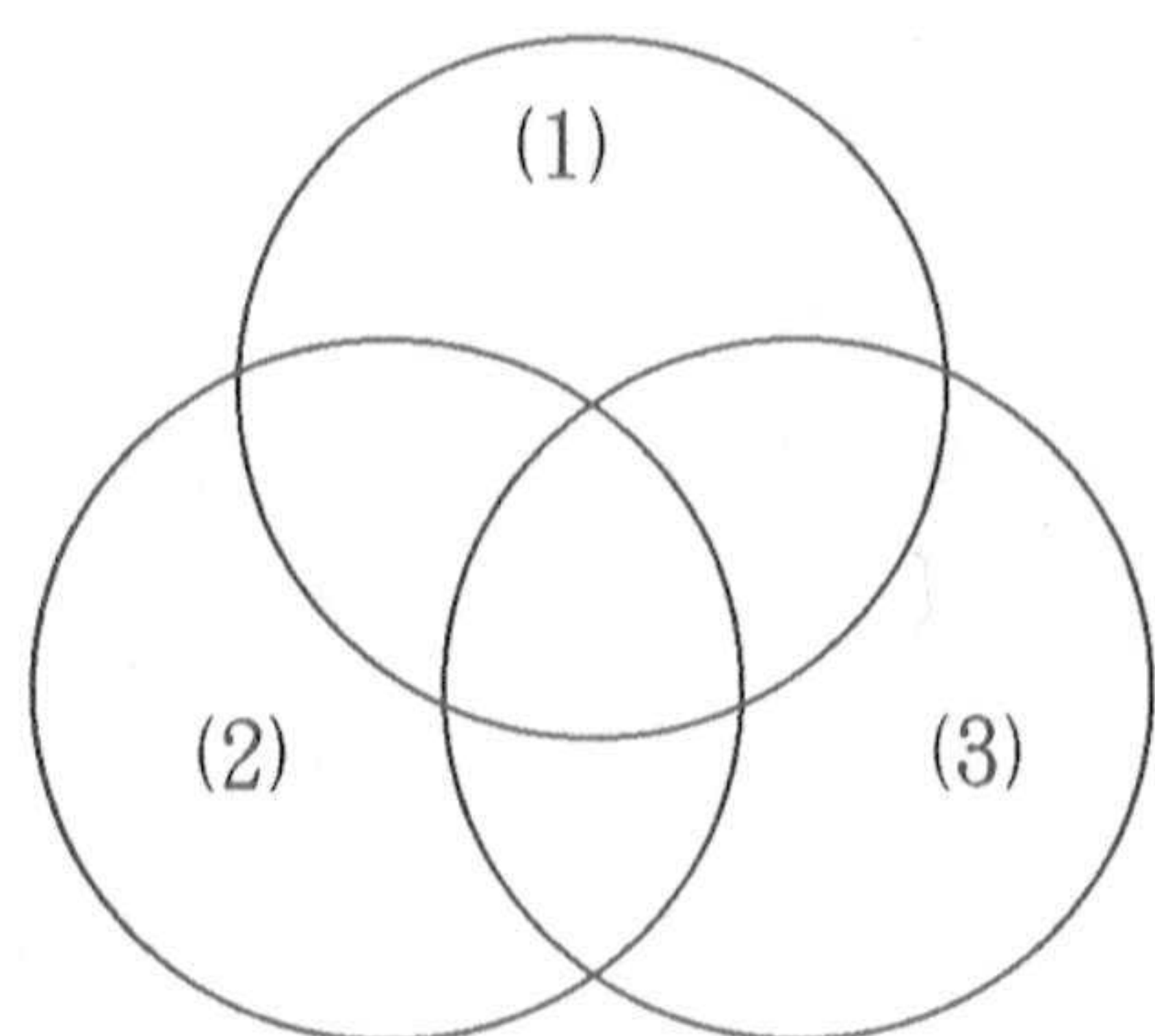
(2) Secondly, we have to make clear the ideal image of the professional social worker in the process of professionalization.

Social work manpower has been given three major images or categories in Japan: (1) the social work personnel, (2) the social welfare laborer, and (3) the social worker or the social work professional. They have their own main attributes respectively: (1) cause, mission or sense of a value system, (2) awareness as a laborer, and (3) professional knowledge and skills.

However, I would like to believe that a social worker should have all three attributes. The ideal image of a social worker might be shown at the portion of the chart below with the diagonal lines.

Images and Names of Social Work Manpower
and Their Major Attributes

Social work personnel : sense of a value system



Social welfare
laborer

:awareness as a laborer

Social work professional
(Social worker)

:knowledge and skills

(3) Thirdly, it seems to me that we should see it as necessary to exchange information or ideas concerning the present situation, including issues of social workers in the United States and Japan, especially in these days. The reason being that the position of social workers in Japan is quite undeveloped and is certainly on a much lower level when compared to social workers in the United States. On the other hand, the position of social workers in the United States might be too developed, too professionalized to exist as a dedicated and altruistic helping profession.

I have heard from social workers and scholars and have read that some segment of American social workers are copying from other existing professions and have a tendency to be too political and somewhat hypocritical in advocating their own status. They are not ethically committed to minority groups or the poor, who are at the depths of a society. They might be becoming The Unloved Profession (Richan and Mendelsohn). In this sense, they might need to reexamine their values and commitment to the needy, as do the not so sophisticated but more altruistic social workers of Japan.

Richan and Mendelsohn state that:

"Social work has become the unloved profession—unloved by its clients whom it has ceased to serve,
unloved by the system that it has failed to reinforce,
unloved by its peers whose respect it has lost,
and, most poignantly, since it has not remained true to its own commitments,
unloved even by itself."

The social work professional in the United States has difficulty from the viewpoint of value systems or altruism as a helping profession. Doctors and lawyers are facing these same problems today.

The social worker is now Serving and Surviving as a Human Service Workers (J. Robert Russo, 1980). Russo states the following to social work students and social workers:

"You'll probably find that your biggest problems are not with the client but rather with

caseworkers and the organization that pays you.”

It is the organization that is at “The Roots of Bureaucratic Help Giving” (Russo, chapter 2). Another difficult problem facing social workers not only in the United States, but all over the world is, namely;

Are social workers today also becoming more and more bureaucratic?

In leaving you with these thoughts, let me remind you that we as a profession have numerous issues to discuss at the international level as we attempt to determine what social workers should be.

[要 約]

「我が国の社会福祉専門職に関する基本的な論争点」

秋山 智久

わが国の社会福祉専門職に関しては、戦後一貫して或る論議が戦わされて来たといってもいいであろう。その“基本的な論争点”は、1987年に「社会福祉士及び介護福祉士法」が制定されても、大きくは変わっていないと思われる。

それらの社会福祉専門職、特にその専門職化を巡る五

つの“基本的な論点”を二分法の形式で整理してみたものが本論文である。

それらの五つの論点とは次の通りである。

- 1 反専門職か、専門職化か？
- 2 社会科学に基づく理論構築か、価値をも重視する社会福祉専門職化か
- 3 社会福祉労働か、社会福祉専門職か
- 4 職業的な経験重視か、教育的な背景重視か
- 5 職業的な統制・規範か、専門職的な統制・規範か

こうした戦後の社会福祉専門職の資格化の中での論争を、筆者が行った社会福祉専門職に関する全国調査の数字などを挙げながら整理を試みた。

最後に社会福祉専門職化に関する残された三つの主要な課題を提起する。

一つは、何のための専門職化かというその目的に関する基本的な問いかけである。

二つには、社会福祉従事者の三つのイメージを検討しながら、新しいソーシャルワーカー像を考察する。

三つには、国際的に最も専門職化が進んでいる米国の情報を必要としつつも、70年代の米国のソーシャルワーカーのように「愛されぬ専門職」になってはいけないという警告をするのである。